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UNCLAS BELGRADE 001360

SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y -- CORRECTED PARA 1 MARKINGS

SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SR](#) [KV](#)

SUBJECT: Reservists Protest Back Wages in South Serbia

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) Military reservists in south Serbia continue protests, seeking additional payments for their prior military service during the Kosovo conflict. The protests grab headlines and inconvenience regional travel, but pose no significant threat to order or stability, and protesters will likely have their day in court. End Summary.

On-Going Demonstration

¶2. (U) For almost a month a group of military reservists from Kursumlija, a town in south Serbia near the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) with Kosovo have protested alleged irregularities of wartime per diem payments. The protests include rallies, blockades of municipal buildings, road blocks of the Nis-Pristina highway, and a two-week hunger strike. The group, which numbers between 200 to 1500, claims that the Ministry of Defense owes them additional per diem payments for their three-month service during the 1999 Kosovo conflict. The group's dissatisfaction began after 200 other reservists successfully collected extraordinary payments of wartime per diems as a result of private legal action in the Kursumlija municipal court.

¶3. (U) In response to the protests, the Serbian Government established an inter-ministerial working group to investigate the matter and propose appropriate measures. During the last week of September, the MOD sent State Secretary Zoran Jeftic to meet with the reservists and to hear their concerns. Protestors have met with retired General Bozidar Delic, current Deputy Speaker of Parliament and a Radical Party (SRS) member of the Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee. After the meeting, Delic announced his support for the protestors. The Ministry of Defense claims that the Government has paid all wartime per diems and posted on its website the signed receipts of all 26,000 reservists. In late September, the MOD accused the 200 reservist who had previously managed to collect additional payments through the courts of fraud and abuse of legal procedure and announced it would file criminal charges against them. Assistant Minister for the MOD, Bojan Dimitrijevic, told Poloff on October 5 that the Ministry of Justice would likely now take the lead in resolving this issue, and that the MOD considers its role in the matter closed.

Comment

¶4. (U) Despite SRS support for the protestors, there are no indications that this protest has any wider political connotations and most likely the courts will resolve the matter. End Comment.

BRUSH